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PRELIMINARY STATEMENT
of
ALTERNATIVES
for the
MUSKOKA DISTRICT
LOCAL GOVERNMENT REVIEW



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MUSKOKA DISTRICT LOCAL GOVERNMENT REVIEW

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PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

of

ALTERNATIVES

for the

MUSKOKA DISTRICT

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REVIEW

November 22, 1967

Preliminary Statement of Alternatives
for the
Muskoka District Local Government Review

INTRODUCTION

In order to evaluate an existing system of local government and propose changes to improve it, a definition of good local government is necessary as a standard of measurement.

No such definition is likely to prove acceptable to all, but without some consensus on ends, we are unlikely to reach agreement on means.

Criteria

As a basis for discussion therefor, a good government is here defined in simplest terms as one which is responsive to the needs of its citizens, taking needs in the broadest sense to include the minimizing of costs as well as the maximizing of benefits. In terms of tangible costs and benefits like taxes and direct services, this is essentially an economic concept emphasizing efficiency; but the inclusion of intangible benefits like freedom and self-determination, and intangible costs like restriction and loss of autonomy, makes it a highly political concept concerned with the disposition of power in society. In either light, the response to many and divergent needs requires balance and compromise, the essence of the demo-

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cratic political process -- and the requirement for responsiveness itself emphasizes the democratic form.

An ideal or optimum balance in the response to often-conflicting needs is therefore the essential requirement of a good government, and failure to give due response to significant needs may be taken as the mark of an inadequate one.

Optimum balance of course involves judgements as to the relative importance of the various needs, a subject on which full agreement is unlikely. Particularly in times of changing values like the present, the development of even a general agreement as to what is more important is apt to be very difficult. Yet the recognition and to some extent the molding of such a consensus is precisely the art of the politician. And when a considerable proportion of the politicians in an area agree that some significant needs are not being met, this is convincing evidence that the present government of that area is inadequate.

It was just such a situation in Muskoka which led to the request for a Review.

Kinds of Inadequacy

Failure of response may of course result merely from elected officials losing touch with the changing needs of the electorate, in which case no changes in the structure of government would be deemed necessary.

But if the un-met needs are growing beyond the capability of the present units of government to deal with them,

changes in the structure and functions of the units may be the only satisfactory way of adapting to the situation.

The symptoms of such structural and functional inadequacy will be found in problems which, while recognized, remain unsolved because none of the existing councils or boards can cope with them alone, and effective cooperative action is not forthcoming.

The Present Situation in Muskoka

Although the documentation of such symptoms in the Review Area is not yet complete, it is already clear at this stage of the Review that there are numerous problems of this nature in evidence here, in the fields of planning, assessment, capital borrowing, roads, welfare and education to name but a few.

As the evidence in support of this contention will be presented in the research report, it is not discussed in this statement, beyond noting that there is already apparent a considerable body of local opinion which is convinced that some more or less significant changes in the structure of local government will be required if the present and future problems of Muskoka are to be adequately met.

The Purpose of the Review

Although the review is necessarily concerned with such problems, it should be stressed that it is also concerned with the identification and as far as possible the preservation of those aspects of the present structure of

changes in the structure and functions of the units may be the only satisfactory way of adapting to the situation. The symptoms of such structural and functional changes will be found in chronic fatigue, while recognition remains unaltered because some of the existing conditions of boards can cope with these signs, and effective adaptive action is not forthcoming.

The Present Situation in America

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The Future of the Review

Although the review is necessarily concerned with the present, it should be stressed that it is also concerned with the identification and as far as possible the removal of those aspects of the present structure of

local government which have proven their value and continuing usefulness. There is no merit in change for its own sake. And since most change involves giving up something of value in order to gain something deemed to be of greater value, it is essential that there be reasonable assurance that the net gain will in fact be worth the price that is paid.

POSSIBILITIES FOR CHANGE

Before attempting to identify some of the main alternatives for change, it will be useful to consider the variables involved. These may be identified in summary form as political power, governmental units, and the system of organization both within and among the units.

By power is meant the authority and responsibility to perform certain functions within an area of jurisdiction.

The units of local government are the entities which are given the power, within stated boundaries. They include the municipalities themselves, and the semi-autonomous boards, both local and joint or district-wide.

The system of organization determines the people who will operate the units, the roles they will play, and their inter-relationships.

As each of these three may vary, it is apparent that in their various combinations they make possible a very large number of alternative forms of local government.

Thus not only may the power be distributed in various ways among the units, but also the total amount of authority and responsibility delegated by the Province to the district as a whole may be increased or decreased.

Similarly, not only may the number of local units within the district be increased or decreased, but also the outer boundaries of the district itself might be altered.

Again, for any given number of units with a given

distribution of power, different systems of election, forms of councils and boards, and staff administrations are possible.

To be more specific, the authority and responsibility that go with power may be granted on a mandatory or permissive basis; they may be given more or less permanently as a right, or delegated on condition and subject to withdrawal; and they may or may not include the ability to levy on sufficient tax resources or to qualify for sufficient grants to enable the responsibilities to be adequately met.

Similarly, the number of municipalities and of both district-wide and local boards could be increased or decreased, with or without incorporation of the presently unorganized territories. And a second tier unit could be added over the municipalities or a two-tier structure developed for one or more of the boards. Within such two-tier systems, authority could of course be divided in many different ways on either a permanent basis, or by delegation from one tier to the other and subject to recall.

In any of these possible systems, the method of election or appointment and the terms of the various offices could also vary; in a two-tier system in particular, the issue of direct or indirect election to the upper tier would have to be resolved. And various administrative arrangements could also be considered in each case; larger, more efficient staffs might serve two or more units on a shared or contractual basis.

These illustrations do not exhaust the possibilities of course, but they do help to emphasize an important point: that through the review process a single alternative will be chosen from a very large number of possibilities. If the choice is to be the wisest one, the experience and wisdom of those who know and love Muskoka best must be brought to bear in a decisive way on the decision.

If the Review is to succeed, it is essential that you start now to grapple seriously with the hard choices which must be made.

SOME OF THE ALTERNATIVES

A rational choice can only be made among concrete alternatives, and the purpose of this statement is to outline a half dozen of these, as a starting point for serious discussion. The alternatives given below have been chosen to cover the spectrum, ranging between relatively little change from the status quo through to drastic change. (complete preservation of the status quo involving no change, though a possibility, has been excluded as contradictory to the request that the Review be undertaken).

Through the reaction of the Review Area to these examples, it is hoped that some considerable agreement may emerge as to the degree of change deemed both necessary and acceptable.

It must be emphasized of course that the half dozen alternatives presented in this statement are in no way intended to restrict the full range of choices open to the Review Area. It is a very real possibility that the solution actually chosen as a culmination of the Review will not bear a close resemblance to any of the examples discussed here; or it could comprise certain aspects from two or more of the examples given in a combination again different from any of them.

The alternatives follow in order of progression from least change to greatest.

- (1) Maintain the present municipalities with a few minor boundary adjustments, and add district assessment, a

district welfare administration board, conservation authority coverage (as recommended in the Report of the Select Committee on Conservation Authorities 1967) and a district planning staff service to be jointly supported by and available to all municipalities in the district. Encourage the establishment of planning boards throughout those parts of the district not presently covered.

- (2) Add the additional district-wide services listed in (1), and reduce the number of municipalities in the district by a series of amalgamations accompanied by rationalization of the remaining boundaries, including such significant changes to the outer district boundary as may prove desirable. Unorganized territory in the district would probably be eliminated.
- (3) Retain the present municipalities with a few minor boundary adjustments, and add a second-tier district government with initial responsibility for assessment, welfare administration and regional planning along with the provision of planning staff service to the local municipalities and their planning boards. Conservation authority coverage could also be added but not as a direct responsibility of the district council. And the establishment of local planning boards throughout those parts of the district not presently covered would be encouraged so as to complete the lower tier of the two-level planning system.

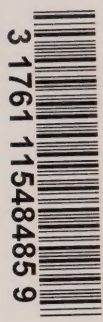
- (4) Add a second-tier district government as in (3), and reduce the number of local municipalities in the district as in (2).
- (5) Establish a two-tier system with a reduced number of units in the lower tier as in (4), but make the lower tier units dependent on the district council, which would delegate only such powers as it wished to the local units. If representation on the district council were indirect, comprising the heads of the local councils (as in a county), this alternative would be essentially the same as that recommended for the Ottawa area in the 1965 Report of The Ottawa, Eastview and Carleton County Local Government Review. As in that Report, it might also be proposed that the district council take over from the present district boards for Health, Child Welfare and Homes for the Aged, direct responsibility for the operation of these services (although the extensive area served by the Health Unit beyond the present district boundary would perhaps prove a serious obstacle to such a move in the field of health).
- (6) Establish a single municipality covering the whole district, with such rationalization of the outer district boundary as appears desirable. Such a solution would parallel that now indicated by the Province for the field of education. As the council of the new municipality would have a very heavy workload, the continuation of the present semi-autonomous

district boards for Health, Child Welfare and Homes for the Aged would probably be essential, and it is possible that additional district boards would in time be found necessary.

CONCLUSION

It is realized that such brief descriptions of alternatives do not provide a sufficient basis for making a rational choice. They are mere sketches, not detailed blueprints, and they suffer particularly from the lack of any discussion of the relative advantages, disadvantages and costs of each alternative.

To develop such a detailed picture for even one alternative however, and in particular to develop any cost estimates which would be at all reliable, would require a very considerable amount of time; to do so for a half dozen alternatives would be clearly beyond the resources of the Review.



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